

Race report: Stafford Half Marathon (or how I learned to stop worrying and love the gels):



Got papped by local photographers (again), nobody did a Radcliffe (always a goal), everybody kept their toenails (also always a goal), medals and bananas all round (of course), and a surprise sub 3-hour result for me (yay). Another half marathon complete!

Originally not on the cards for my 2026 races, but as it's a Harriers staple and I felt it'd be a good long-run for the Great Birmingham Run, it was hard to say no to the Stafford Half Marathon 2026. Very glad I did it too, especially as I snuck in just shy of 3 hours which was my goal this year.

We started just outside of Victoria Park half an hour later than anticipated, which was fed back by many runners, but thankfully the weather was clear and sunny. A run in 12 degrees celsius sounds like perfect conditions and usually it would be, but it felt like full-on summer after training in a very soggy winter. Hopefully, this'll be a good start to acclimatising to milder temps in time for the GBR.

Once we got going, the support was certainly a lot louder than I expected! The residents of Stafford turned out in droves to shout and fling sweets at a load of strangers, and for that I

was very thankful (and emotional as soon as I hit mile 13). Sue Thomas and I ran together for the majority of it, bringing the party via a Bluetooth speaker and an iPod full of nostalgic bops. Rob Griffith met us all at Radford Bank for hugs and encouragement (and much-needed water). The marshals were as every good marshal should be: cheerful, full of smiles and ensured none of us got lost.

I'd hit the wall at mile 12 during my first half-marathon last year, but this time I managed to avoid doing so, both mentally and physically. That's not to say Stafford's flat, there's some challenging inclines and Beaconside is certainly a long stretch, but I kept a rather consistent pace for the entire course which I'm chuffed with and crossed the finish line in 2:58:21. SiS gels might go down like Calpol, but they certainly do the trick without drama.



On a bling note: the medals for the half and the 10k are interlocking this year, so of course I've got to return for the 10k now, haven't I? The medal hander-outerer didn't even say 'if you return', it was a 'when'. They know their audience!

Every Harrier put in a fantastic shift: Sue Thomas (3:04:08), Sarah Hunter (2:01:06), Melissa Wright (1:59:32), Victoria Bailey (2:04:18), Sarah Dawson (1:55:31), Brian Evans (1:55:05), Stephen Morgan (01:21:33) and Mark Jones (1:27:40). Very well done everyone!